

# Academic Discourse from Alethurgical Perspective: A Case of Higher Education Reform in Poland

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## 1 Abstract

The phenomenon of the “transformations of the university” (Kwiek, 2010, 2011, 2015) that has been observed over the two past decades is quite complex. Problems concerning state funding for universities, the development of competitive and market-oriented educational institutions and, at the same time, the emphasis on the *egalitarianisation* of higher education and commercialization of contemporary science – these are just some of the indicators of the changes contributing to the erosion of the traditional model of the university. The transition noted in the literature has left its mark on nearly every aspect of academic culture - from the recommended ways to manage the university, through the modification of goals, conditions and methods of education, to radical change of intentions accompanying scientific cognition (Slaughter, Leslie 1997; Melosik 2009; Sułkowski 2016). This paper is aimed to show in what ways the systemic and institutional transformations are accompanied by the discursive construction of “truths” about the reform of higher education in Poland. The presentation is a part of the broader research project entitled “Governmentality of university – a discursive image of the contemporary higher education reform in Poland” supported by the National Centre of Science in Poland, Grant No 2014/14/E/HS6/00671 (see Ostrowicka, Sychalska-Stasiak 2018; Ostrowicka, Stankiewicz 2019; Chomik, Ostrowicka 2019). We are interested to answer **two questions**:

- what truths about the reform of higher education are constructed in the analyzed discourse?
- what alethurgical mechanisms are responsible for their production?

## 2 Theory and method

In the study we used the alethurgic discourse analysis, based on Michel Foucault's lectures on the alethurgy: relations between stating the truth, “the acts of truth”, and governing self and others. According to Foucault (2014: 7) alethurgy is „the manifestations of truth as a set of verbal and non-verbal procedures by which one brings to light what is laid down as truth as opposed to false, hidden, inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten”. Alethurgy, that is a “ritual and complete formulation of truth” (Foucault 2014: 33), is effectively accomplished twice, once at the level of the “truth of gods” and second at the level of the “truth of witnesses”. Actually, it means two mutually complementing types of alethurgies (veridiction, manifestation of truth): alethurgy of the oracle (divine) and the alethurgy of slaves. Criteria to differentiate alethurgy types:

- procedure of extracting the truth,
- modality of knowledge and
- temporal orientation.



**Table 1.** Types of alethurgy - the differences in procedures of extracting the truth, modality of knowledge and temporal orientation

Divine (oracle) alethurgy	Slave (testimony) alethurgy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Procedure based on consultation logic</li> <li>- Truth of overview in the creator's strength; seeing, saying, looking and discourse unity</li> <li>- Linking present and future (obligations, prohibitions, predictions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procedure based on interrogation logic</li> <li>• Truth of overview in the witness's seeing, saying and looking</li> <li>• Linking present and past (recollections, memories, confessions)</li> </ul>

Source: Ostrowicka 2017.

Our research can be described as alethurgical discourse. The empirical basis for the research included 16 scientific monographs by Polish authors published in the years 2011-2014 (i.e. immediately after the introduction of the higher education reform in Poland) and thematically related to the university and higher education. The main direction of our exploration was emergent and inductive. The differences between "alethurgy of the oracle" and "alethurgy of testimony" we captured by comparing patterns of procedures of extracting truth based on the logic of consultation or interrogation, modality of knowledge which indicates different sources of knowledge, temporal orientation which combine the present with the future or the past.

### 3 Results

The results of the research showed different procedures of veridiction based on the "alethurgy of the oracle" and "alethurgy of testimony". The "alethurgy of the oracle" reveals itself in the analyzed discourse in the topos of public debate on higher education reform, the knowledge viewed from the outside and combining the present with the future. The "alethurgy of testimony" is based on the topos of public/submissive public opinion, on the truth coming from experience and combining the present with the past. As a result we can observe several different "truths" about the reform of academic research and higher education in Poland including those in terms of time, space, hope, disillusion and reform as a driving force for analyzed discourse.

**Reform as time** is a meeting of the past, present, and future of the university. The basic assumptions, course, and effects of the reform are revealed in time and through time. This temporization is best expressed by the category of the university's duration, manifesting itself in the discussed discourse as a result of the long versus short duration of the university.

**Reform as space** is the plane of meeting of what is local with what is global. What is global corresponds in the discussed discourse with the reform identified with the Bologna process.

**Reform as hope** is the vision of improving the condition of academic research and higher education in Poland. It is associated with the conviction about the unsatisfactory condition of the higher education sector in Poland.

**Reform as a disillusion:** a missed chance to improve the condition of academic research and higher education in Poland. In turn, it is a reform designed and implemented by politicians. In the discussed discourse, it defines the area of very concrete and meticulous analyses aimed at pinpointing the mistakes made by politicians at the stage of designing and implementing the reform.

**Reform as a driving force** is a generator of academic discourse on higher education. The reform is connected with a meticulous and committed analysis of changes in higher education and the development of research on this subject.



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